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ABSTRACT

This brief report discusses the development of mass participation in the provision of preschool education for 769 children of 3 to 6 years of age in Tan Tien-- a pilot commune located in the Red River Delta, Hai Hung province, North Vietnam. Tan Tien commune is described and the targets of the preschool movement are indicated. Phases of the community mobilization plan (preparation, performance, and evaluation) are delineated. Results of the drive for improved communities and parental involvement in preschool education are cited. (Author/RH)

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A case report

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A CASE REPORT ON PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN A VIETNAMESE COMMUNE

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POPULAR PARTICIPATION IN PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION IN A VIETNAMESE COMMUNE

Tran Thi Tinh

Introduction

In Viet Nam, the pre-school education network attended by children aged from 3 to 5 years, is an integral component of the whole national education system run by the State (Ministry for Education). This network has been thriving since Independence. In the past years, together with a general re-organization of production and labour division, it experienced a tremendous growth in all parts of the country. In some communes, as many as 85 to 95% of children of pre-school age have been taken care of. A great problem now is to strive for a higher quality of general education aimed at ensuring a balanced relation between the quality and the amount of the work performed, and achieving an ever better fulfilment of the objectives of pre-school education; namely to contribute to the formation of the Vietnamese man of a new type, right from early childhood.

To raise the efficiency of education is a difficult problem that depends on many factors. Schools and teaching staff assume an important responsibility in the whole process, but the results achieved would be largely limited if schooling were dispensed in an isolated manner, aloof from the society, without including the large masses of the people and the parents.

The subject dealt with in the following report is "Popular Participation to Children's Education in a Commune". The pilot commune chosen is Tan Tien in Hai Hung province (Red River Delta). The experiences gathered in this testing place will be used in other communes throughout Viet Nam.

Some Characteristic features of Tan Tien commune

Tan Tien is a poor commune living on agriculture. It has a relatively large population of over 7,000, and an area of some 15 square kilometres, lying 25 km. north of Hanoi. In the past two wars against foreign aggression, this commune was seriously threatened. The peasantry have taken up collectivization by setting up agricultural co-operatives, but the average annual income is still low. Just as in the other communes in North Viet Nam, the population of Tan Tien has, since an early date, wiped out illiteracy. Middle-aged grown-ups, on the whole, possess first-degree instruction (fourth class), whereas the younger generation has finished second-degree education (seventh class). An important proportion of the youth have graduated from third-cycle schools (tenth class).

Today Tan Tien boasts of a 31-class pre-school, in which 33 women teachers are taking charge of 769 young children (who amount to 95% of all children from 3 to 5 years of age in the commune). The 31 neat, orderly, brick-built classrooms have adequate furniture and equipment, entirely provided by the village folk.

Target aimed at in the present movement

The population of Tan Tien commune derive a great pride from their pre-school. They provide for the material basis of this establishment, and do not grudge their service in helping its young teachers.

Formerly, on account of their being engrossed in farm-work, and also of their lack of knowledge concerning the process of and responsibilities for education, they would rely exclusively on the pre-school classes for educating their children. Many a good habit which had been imparted to the children at school, was spoilt or thwarted at home by the parents as a result of their lack of understanding of the process of education. Some young children had got accustomed to washing their faces by themselves, but their mothers would not let them do this at home. There were parents who, when angry or vexed, would vent their ill-temper upon their children when they happened to sing and dance. Other parents would not take the trouble to rectify their children's disorderly clothing and unhealthy play. On the other hand, the good deeds performed by youngsters were also not encouraged and appreciated by the elder members of the family. The greatest handicap was that many bad habits still prevailing in families or society, impressed themselves daily on children. Parents indulged in coarse language and manners when swearing at their children. Houses were left in disorder. Basic hygiene in food and drink was lacking. Courtyards and gardens were filled with rubbish. Out of doors, children were seen to play in dirt and filth, and to speak a language full of oaths and obscene words. Others were clad in a careless manner, and did not pay the least attention to public wealth when they deliberately spoiled the shrubs newly planted in public gardens, or beshmirched the walls with foolish or obscene drawings.

Moreover there were cases in which the educational programmes and time-tables were shortened at random because the classrooms were used as gathering places for the community. Some production teams lacked good labour management. The co-operative peasants got used to going to work late and coming back early from the fields. This practice of the grown-ups caused the children to come late to their kindergarten, and to be taken home before classes were over. Absences frequently occurred. When the mothers had rest-days or when the fathers were back home on leave, they kept their children away from school for a long time.

Some families stopped attending regular meetings of parents, and apologized to the summoning teacher by saying: "We are indebted to you for everything you judge it wise to do. We are too busy". Certain parents complained when the pre-school teacher suggested teaching methods to them for their children's education, and replied: "That is all we can do. You are free to admit the child to your class or dismiss her".

While today the people in Tan Tien commune are most desirous to learn, and hold their pre-school in great affection, formerly they did not act correctly due to their lack of understanding. The question was how to help everybody grasp the processes and methods of pre-school education and provide for the necessary organization and guidance to the parents in their efforts towards educating their children.

Community mobilization plan

The mobilization plan included three important steps:

Step 1: Preparation

(a) To have targets and requirements firmly stated:

- The aim pursued was to initiate a large movement of popular participation in children's education, with a view to assisting the pre-school in the fulfilment of its educational function.

- This movement was to achieve two requirements: firstly to help everybody to realize the need for educating children into men and women of a new type, and to comprehend educational targets, curricula, time-tables and educational methods. Secondly, to give everybody a clear understanding of his or her own responsibilities in this respect, so as to perform practical actions likely to improve the quality of education.

(b) To investigate the various cases and kinds of popular merits and shortcomings with regard to children's education (for instance 40% of the population of Vinh Loc hamlet were still using vulgar and foul language, or were still indulging in drink and revelries on such occasions as burials and marriages).

(c) To write explanatory documents (on the basis of the curriculum for pre-school) for the parents.

(d) To project the content of an emulation drive aimed at ensuring the participation of all community services and mass organizations in children's education, with clearly defined requirements in regard to each organization, co-operative member or parent.

(e) To propose to the community authorities to convene a meeting of cadres from all services and mass organizations in the commune and hamlets, under the president of the commune, in order to ensure general agreement of all on the policy, the plan and the content of the project.

Step 2: Performance

(a) Pilot site: Da Nguu hamlet. The following have been accomplished:

- A meeting was convened between the teachers entrusted with pre-school classes and a representative of the managing board of the commune's pre-school. This meeting was meant to achieve unanimous approval of the mobilizing plan for concerted actions with families and interested organizations; to find out the difficulties now facing the teachers; to find out the merits and shortcomings evinced by the population in pre-school education; and to find suitable solutions to the problems.

- A meeting was held with the communal cell of the Vietnamese Women's Union for elaborating concerted actions; for enhancement of the social status of the pre-school; and for laying down mother-members' responsibilities in the education of children. The main content ran as follows:

  - regular prompting and shaping of good havits in young children in conformity with the pre-school's educational plan;

  - regular attendance at parents' meetings, frank criticism and suggestions to the teachers towards fulfilment of the latter's responsibilities;

  - self training of parents for the sake of setting a good example for their children.

- A meeting gathered people of all ages to discuss their role in exhorting the parents to set the pace in the education of their children, at home and out of doors. The oldsters also divided among themselves such various actions as pertain to their age, such as looking after pre-school classrooms and the school garden; raising medical herbs for curing infant diseases; repairing school implements and toys.

- A meeting was convened with the managing boards of first and second cycle general schools, to lay down emulation norms for the pupils of these schools:

  - set the pace for younger children in every aspect, at home and out of doors;

  - help their younger brothers and sisters in their play, take them to school, and return them home at proper times;

  - fabricate toys;

  - ensure the protection of the pre-school;

  - ensure regular information by pre-school teachers about the elder pupils' good behaviour or mischief.

- Visits to pre-school classes were made by delegates of mass organizations, administrative services and parents. After attending a teaching session, the following typical remarks were made by parents: "The pre-school teacher has to look after 20 or 30 children and knows how to be obeyed, to maintain discipline. Her pupils are clever singers and dancers, tidy and polite. She is a good teacher indeed!" A soman added: "With regard to children, a good breeding should consist of encouragement and exhortation". Many local officials decided to provide funds and manpower for the purchase or fabrication of new installations and toys for the benefit of pre-school classes (the school yard must be made even to prevent the children from falling, the swings wanted new ropes, new sand - or water pools must be built for the children to play in).

- With regard to parents, the following propaganda methods have been applied:

  - monthly gatherings were held for political information, pedagogical explanation, report on the progress achieved by the children, etc.;

  - daily exchange of information took place when the parents brought their children or picked them up from the pre-school; when children were brought in, the pre-school teacher inquired about her young pupils' behaviour at home to provide appropriate suggestions about educational methods for correcting their wrong doings or for citing their good deeds before the whole class. In the evening, when handing back the children, the teacher acquainted the father

or mother of the child's new improvements and called attention to those matters which required a concerted education at home, for instance to remind little Yen to brush her teeth before going to bed, or little Lan to refrain from wiping her nose check-wards with her hand when the nose is running.

- individual approaches were also reported to: group or community activization may at times prove inefficient. The school board will then have recourse to individual contacts, taking into account the character and peculiarities of the person or family concerned. The helper may be an old man enjoying great prestige in the community or a younger member in the family. In other cases, the assistance of many people proves necessary. For instance Mrs. Chin's home is known to lie in constant mess and disorder. The Youth Organization persuaded her daughter Loan, a Youth member, to bring her family to a neat, orderly way of living. Mr. Duan resents the criticism of the pre-school teacher that his sown is always dirty. He refuses to let the child go to school. The old members of the pre-school's managing board were asked to help clear up the misunderstanding.

(b) Spreading of the mobilization movement over the whole commune

With the experiences drawn in Da Nguu pilot hamlet, Tan Tien's pre-school has extended the movement over the whole commune after similar methods. Many hamlets have proceeded in a creative manner:

- At Hoa Binh hamlet, the content of the present movement was brought into a gathering held under the motto "the entire people discuss state affairs".

- At Nhan Noi, Vinh Loc and Thong Nhat hamlets this movement was tied up with another for "whole people's participation in building up a new style of life".

Evaluation

The following tangible results have been achieved:

- The children are punctually taken to school and led home. The number of tidy school-goers has increased. They are well combed, wear clogs or sandals and hats. The parents give more and better care to their children and will have them tidily washed, combed and clad before going to school.

- Hundreds of school implements and toys have been improved or added. A certain number of reconditioned or newly built classrooms have been provided, and adequate equipment made available.

- Everybody realizes that pre-school education requires unanimity of views between the school, the family and the society, on the building up of the new man or woman from early childhood. To this end, a general participation must be ensured. Many people have understood the content and scope of the teachers' and pupils' activities for pre-school education, and have grasped the needs and methods related to the education of a child of pre-school age. They have also realized that everybody is duty bound to set a good example in the interests of the children.

- The emulation drive for taking part in pre-school education improvement in numerous forms, amidst the people and various mass organizations, is growing with time.

- Parents have become more attached to the pre-school. Monthly meetings are regularly attended. Weekly and monthly co-operation among teachers and parents being ensured, most families agree unanimously on the school's requirements and see that their children have regular and punctual school attendance.

Besides this general participation in the drive for better education, other results have also been achieved:

- Pre-school teachers are greatly enthused by the present movement. Many of them mature professionally as they participate in their mobilizing work for a concerted educational effort. Teachers who were shy formerly, have to conduct, with confidence, a gathering of parents and present a clear report on the children.

- Mass organizations also undertake, through the present drive, to raise the quality of their activities, such as the Youth's Mobement for Building up the New Man, the Women's Movement for Training Cleverer Mothers, and the Drive for Building up a New Style of Life in the Commune.

- The pupils in general education schools, which take part in the present approach, have also attained higher standards of behaviour. The pupils have become more polite towards grown-ups, and refrain from foul language. They are respectful to the pre-school teachers and helpful to the pre-school pupils at home and at school. Many bad

habits and ways of life in families and the hamlets have been reformed. Such wrong doings as swearing at one's children, beating them (at Vinh Loc hamlet), coarse language (at Hoa Binh) are gradually declining.

- In many production teams, cases of late coming and early going back have decreased. Dau, who is responsible for labour, declared: "At the rattling signal of the Kindergarten school, all co-operative members are present in their fields. No more time is wasted in waiting and standing".

On the whole, the present approach has achieved an improvement in the quality of education.

The drive for the entire people's participation in improving pre-school education has made it clear that the raising of the quality of pre-school education is closely linked with the general understanding and the conception of education, and with the habits and ways of life in the family and the society. To this end, the pre-school school is bound to help everybody, irrespective of familial or social position, to take part in the movement through daily practical deeds.

In order to achieve universal participation, an energetic effort must be made towards a general, practical understanding of educational aims, content and activities of pre-school education. At the same time the people must grasp what they have to do so as to make a better contribution to improving the education of children. After they have got a correct idea of the work, it is necessary to organize and guide them for immediate performance. Practical participation alone helps consolidate the knowledge acquired. This organizational work must be regularly, continually carried out on an ever increasing scale.

The new approach should not proceed in a hurry. Perseverance is needed. The pre-school should act as a nucleus of the drive, and develop, over time, better and more efficient education of children.

Conclusion

All Vietnamese families have young children. The aspirations of all parents are to see that their children develop a healthy and thorough growth. The science of educating little children should be understood and unanimously agreed upon by all members of the society. Devoted enthusiasm and understanding will make the masses the masters of the work of educating their children under the State's guidance and concern.